

# The Public's Health

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## Choosing a Nursing Home

*How do you select the best nursing home for a family's particular needs? How can you know you've made the right choice? The Department of Health's Division of Facilities Regulation keeps tabs on nursing homes in Rhode Island through its inspection program. This information goes into a database available through the Internet. Now you can use the web to help answer these questions. Wayne Farrington, Chief of the Division of Facilities Regulation, offers some insights on becoming better informed about the quality of nursing home care.*

Most of the "What is a good nursing facility" questions usually come from citizens who have just been told by a hospital that their loved one has to be discharged tomorrow and is going to the XYZ Home. Many people ask, "Is this a good home?" The answer is not a "yes" or a "no." Rather, it involves knowing what the loved one needs, both medically and socially, and considering what is the best location for the loved one so family and friends can visit without burdensome travel constraints.

Answering that question becomes easier because of information about nursing homes now available on the HEALTH website. The Division of Facilities Regulation conducts annual on-site surveys of the state's nursing home facilities. Through the Internet, family members can now research HEALTH's regulatory compliance record for a facility and compare it to others in the state. This information helps families decide which facility to choose.

### How to Get There

On the left side of the front page of HEALTH's website, [www.healthri.org](http://www.healthri.org), under the heading of "Health

Care Quality," there is an item titled "Nursing Home Quality." Clicking on this link brings you to the home page of the Office of Facilities Regulation. A quick click on "Survey Performance Tool" brings you to a table that displays a portion of the Medicare and Medicaid Survey results for each nursing facility in the state. Only four facilities don't participate. The matrix shows the results of 44 standards and gives a point for compliance with each standard and no points for non-compliance. The standards cover the general categories of Administration, Nursing, Resident Rights, Food, and Environment.

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| RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH<br><i>Safe and Healthy Lives In Safe and Healthy Communities</i>  |   |
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| DIVISION OF FACILITIES REGULATION   |   |
| <b>Rhode Island Department of Health</b><br>Division of Facilities Regulation<br>3 Capitol Hill - Room 200<br>Providence, RI 02908<br>(401) 222-2550<br>(800) 345-5000(TTY) | <b>Welcome to the Division of Facilities Regulation Homepage</b><br><br>Residents and their families using health care facilities in Rhode Island can be assured that the Department of Health has established the highest quality of care standards to ensure that facilities provide health care services in a clean and safe environment. The Division of Facilities Regulation operates a resident focused, cooperative, uniform enforcement program in accordance with state licensing and federal certification standards.<br><br>@ Who We Are And What We Do |
| <b>HEALTH Resources</b><br>For details on nursing home deficiencies and to compare all nursing homes visit the "Nursing Home Comparison"                                    |   |

*Follow the links: Clicking "Nursing Home Quality" on the HEALTH home page takes you to the Office of Facilities Regulation section. Clicking "Survey Performance Tool" brings you to a table that displays Medicare and Medicaid Survey results for nursing facilities in the state.*

**Quality Health Care:** *What is it? Can you measure it? Can consumers really "comparison shop," matching up care they can expect from one provider against care from other providers?*

Here are some tools, easily accessible on the Internet, so you can find out about:

- Physicians..... p. 2
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- Nursing homes..... 1
- Health insurance plans..... 1

*Plus*

A new face for minority health (p.4.)

## How Good is Your Health Plan?

How does one find out about health plans in Rhode Island? In June 2000 the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) released Health Plan performance statistics on the HEALTH website: [www.healthri.org](http://www.healthri.org). These statistics include financial, Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS), clinical/preventive, utilization review, and regional/U.S. benchmark data for calendar year 1998. Some of the highlights from this public report include the following:

- Eighty-seven cents out of every dollar in premium revenue was spent on health care services (the medical expense ratio) for commercial (not Medicare, not Medicaid) Health Plan members;
- The health plans in Rhode Island were not financially strong. The top three

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# Improving Patient Care Through Better Information

The Internet is fast becoming a major source of health care information. Both physicians and patients turn to online resources in order to make better use of the limited time that they can spend with each other during office visits. Information about providers fosters a better dialogue between physicians and their patients. HEALTH's Physician Profiles website offers consumers valuable information about health care providers that can aid in this process.

Rhode Island was the second state in the nation to implement a Physician Profiles program. Compiling these data has been a tall order. The Board of Medical Licensure and Discipline has only three-quarters of the information available on its web site as of this writing, and is making steady progress on the rest.

Clicking on "RI Physician Profiles" on the HEALTH home page, at [www.healthri.org](http://www.healthri.org), links to the Division of Medical Licensure and Discipline page, a portal to information about physicians. Site visitors can get information on a physician's date of initial issuance of license, current license status, and license expiration date. Employers, credentialing agencies and other states find this data invaluable. HEALTH staff report a tremendous savings of time since written verification of license information is no longer necessary.



*Keeping tabs: License 2000's Maureen Slowik accesses the Office of Health Regulation's database for health care providers in the state. "Physician Profiles" on the web provides summaries of doctors' education, experience, and areas of specialization. HEALTH manages the licenses of 458 professions and occupations.*

There is additional information about licensees in Physician Profiles that is available now, and more to come as the License 2000 program continues to unfold:

- Names of medical schools and dates of graduation;
- Graduate medical education;
- Any final board disciplinary actions in the last ten years in this or any other state;



*A glimpse into the future: Listeners on June 6 in the HEALTH auditorium are briefed on License 2000, which will make full use of the powers of the Internet. The public will learn more about providers of health care and other professional services. Providers will reap the benefits of online application for licenses and renewals.*

- Any criminal convictions for felonies in the last ten years (future License 2000 addition);
- Revocation or restriction of hospital privileges or resignation from or non-renewal of medical staff membership within the last ten years (future License 2000 addition);
- All medical malpractice court judgments, arbitration awards, and settlements in which a payment is awarded to a complaining party during the last ten years (future License 2000 addition).

Pending malpractice claims and actual amounts paid by or on behalf of a physician in connection with a malpractice judgment, award, or settlement will not be disclosed to the public, in accordance with the Profiles law. The disposition of paid claims will be reported in three graduated categories indicating the level of significance of the award or settlement within the physician's specialty. Further, comparisons of malpractice payment data are accompanied by material explaining the effect of medical specialty, length of practice, and other factors on malpractice outcome. The remainder of the malpractice and hospital discipline information is scheduled for release this fall.

In addition to the above, each physician profile includes:

- Specialty board certification;
- Number of years in practice;
- Names of the hospitals where the physician has privileges;
- Appointments to medical school faculties and responsibility for graduate medical education within the last ten years;
- The location of the physician's primary practice setting;
- Language translating services that may be available at the physician's primary practice location.
- Publications in peer-reviewed medical literature within the last ten years (future License 2000 addition);

*Continued on next page*

*Physician Profiles, continued*

- Professional or community service activities and awards (future License 2000 addition);

Many commercial “for profit” sites have emerged on the Internet. Most charge physicians a fee to be included and rely on information provided by the physicians. These sites accept advertising and generally do not verify the information provided by the physicians. Many of the commercial sites reveal little or no disciplinary or malpractice information.

The feedback from patients and providers about Rhode Island’s program has been positive. Physicians, even those with some disciplinary mark on their record, are having open discussions with their patients. Many patients report feeling positive about the discussion and renewing the unique bond between doctor and patient.

*by Nikki Samaras Deary, Project Manager,  
RI Dept. of Health License 2000*

## Hospitals in Rhode Island Measured Against National Standards

Through a unique collaboration, the first such in the nation, the Department of Health’s (HEALTH) web site reports ratings on the quality of care in Rhode Island’s hospitals. Anyone with a connection to the Internet can learn how any Rhode Island hospital measures up to national standards of care.

This initiative joins a steadily increasing number of programs through which HEALTH provides public information on quality of nursing homes, health care providers, and health plans. HEALTH’s web-site posts the current hospital accreditation status with explanations about the process and the Joint Commission reports.

HEALTH worked collaboratively with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (Joint Commission) and the Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) to make accreditation status for all hospitals in Rhode Island available to the public. This initiative joins a steadily increasing number of programs through which HEALTH provides public information on quality of nursing homes, health care providers, and health plans. HEALTH’s website ([www.healthri.org](http://www.healthri.org)) posts the current hospital accreditation status with explanations about the process and the Joint Commission reports.

Richard Croteau, MD, from the Joint Commission states “This is a unique and efficient way to present information about Rhode Island hospitals as well as provide linkage to the Joint Commission national website.” The Joint Commission, which accredits nearly 20,000 health care organizations, began releasing performance reports to the public in 1994.

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*Health Plan,  
continued from p. 1*

commercial health plans all had operating losses. All of the Medicare plans lost money, and two out of four Medicaid plans lost money.

- Rhode Island commercial health plan rates were better than both the national and regional averages with respect to child immunization (79%), advising smokers to quit (69%), screening for breast cancer (78%), and first trimester prenatal care (92%).

- The actual denial/adverse decision rates for utilization review (prior authorization, concurrent review, retrospective review) are quite low. The overall denial rate was .7%, and the adverse decision rate was 1.4%.

- Consumers and providers enjoyed a substantial success rate on appeals to health plans for denial of services. The overall success rate for appeals was 48%.

- Blue Cross (including Blue CHIP) had 57% of the commercial market, United Health Care of New England had 23%, and Harvard Pilgrim of New England (no longer operating in Rhode Island) had 13%.

Anyone wishing to review all the 1998 Health Plan statistics can visit the Health Department website or call 222-2231 for a print copy of the report. The calendar year 1999 Health Plan performance statistics are currently being collected by HEALTH and will be available before the end of this calendar year. Going forward, Health Plan performance statistics will be collected on an annual basis by HEALTH. The calendar year 2000 statistics will include Consumer Assessment of Health Plans (CAHPS) patient satisfaction measures. All of this Health Plan data collection and public reporting is being conducted under the Health Care Accessibility & Quality Assurance Act of 1996 (Chapter 17.13 of the General Laws of Rhode Island).

*by William Waters, PhD,  
Deputy Director  
HEALTH*



*Nursing Care, continued from p. 1*

The narrative on the Facilities Regulation home page explains how to use and interpret the ratings. HEALTH uses two annual surveys for each facility, so a facility's maximum score is 88 points. But a facility may also have had a complaint investigation resulting in a finding of non-compliance. All these findings should be considered.

Do you need more detailed information? At the bottom of the web page locate a highlighted link, "Nursing Home Compare." Clicking here takes you to the federal Health Care Financing Administration's (HCFA) web site. It contains all of the results from the most recent survey. The text of the actual deficiencies cited and the facility's plan of correction are not yet available. Federal law only requires that the statement of deficiency and the plan of correction be "accessible at the facility." It is also available at the Office of Facilities Regulation. Within the next year or so HCFA will have the ability to post all survey results on its website.

Family members and consumers are welcome to call the Office of Facilities Regulation at (401) 222-2566 with questions

about the survey or for more information about any of the facilities surveyed.

*by Wayne Farrington, Chief,  
Division of Facilities Regulation*

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The HEALTH website section titled "Hospital Information for the Public" provides the accreditation status, dates and overall scores for each hospital in Rhode Island. For more detailed information in key areas such as medication use and infection control, the HEALTH website links directly to the Joint Commission national performance reports.

The ratings do not attempt to make comparisons between hospitals in the state, but, rather, look at each hospital from the perspective of how it compares with the Joint Commission's existing national benchmarks of quality. The performance scores reflect how each hospital measured up against these Joint Commission standards, and not against the other hospitals. The scores are based on a 100-point scale. A high score does not guarantee quality patient care, but provides one indicator of a hospital's ability to provide quality care.

"Hospitals in Rhode Island are committed to quality care," says Cathy Boni, RN, MSN, Vice President of Clinical Affairs at the Hospital Association of RI. "This is just one of the many initiatives that we are working on with the Department of Health and the Joint Commission to measure and report hospital care."

*by Mary Logan, Program Coordinator,  
Health Quality Performance Measurement  
and Reporting Program*



*Vania Brown-Small, MS, RN, CS, is HEALTH's new Minority Health Coordinator. Before joining the Department, Ms. Brown-Small was Director of Health and Human Services at the Narragansett Indian Health Center. Prior to that, she worked for the Newport County Community Mental Health Center. She was selected for her new position in conjunction with representatives of the Minority Health Advisory Committee and the Minority Health Promotion Centers.*



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